Child Outcome Summary (COS) Team Decision Making Process
Quality Practices – Observation/Reflection Tool - Element Descriptions
MD Version

I. COS Planning

Planning for the Child Outcomes Summary (COS) team decision making process is essential and can occur in a variety of ways. Discussions with the family and with other team members ahead of time can make COS decision making within the team process more fluid and collaborative. Depending upon the system design, the inclusion of a pre-conference/pre-team may also be possible.

1. Team members **review typical child growth and development** for the age of the child (as necessary).
   - Having a clear understanding of typical development is critical to ground the COS discussion. It may be necessary to reference developmental milestone tools, early learning guidelines and standards to provide a clear picture of age-expected skills.

2. Team members ensure that **multiple sources** of information about the child’s **current** functional skills are available for review (e.g., parent report, child care provider, early childhood mental health (ECMH) consultant, information from the Early Learning Assessment (ELA), observation, evaluation, progress reports).
   - Information must come from different perspectives and tools to ensure a complete picture of how the child functions across settings. COS ratings reduce rich information about a child’s functioning into a common metric allowing a summary or progress across children. This involves synthesizing input from many sources familiar with the child. Through the full team decision making process valid conclusions about the child’s current abilities can be made. It is important to note that while progress is important the ratings represent the child’s current functioning at the time of the rating. As part of planning for the COS discussion with the family, the team should have ready access to all needed resources.

3. Team members ensure there is information about the child’s functioning for each of the **three child outcomes**.
   - A rich amount of information about the child’s functioning relative to each of the three outcomes is necessary. This includes the right skills with the right outcome area. This is different from assessing developmental domains as skills in developmental domains are integrated across the three early childhood outcomes. Team members should make note of any additional information needed that may need to be collected during the COS team decision making process.

4. Team members consider the child’s skills in terms of **AE-IF-F** (Age-Expected, Immediate Foundational, Foundational) with reference to **age-anchoring/age-expected** tools and resources.
   - Information about a child’s functional abilities in terms of the developmental progression of abilities ensures the team understands how close or far a child’s abilities are from abilities expected for his/her chronological age. Accurate reference to AE-IF-F is critical and when there is question additional resources should be referenced.

5. Team members ensure there is information about the child’s **current** functioning across settings/opportunities.
   - Each of the outcomes refer to actions that children need to be able to carry out or to knowledge, and skills they need to have in order to function successfully across a variety of settings. Discussion about a child’s behaviors (relative to each of the outcomes) across settings and opportunities helps teams understand any variations in the child’s current abilities in different settings and situations. Emphasis should be placed on the child’s current functioning, as that is what is being measured. As part of the planning process, team members may identify the need for further information about a child’s functioning in different settings (e.g., childcare, Head Start, private nursery school, Judy Center).

6. Team members **discuss the process for reviewing and engaging the parents** in the COS rating and discussion.
   - By discussing initial plans ahead of time the team can ensure all the required information is ready and available. Additional information may be questions team members have about the child’s abilities that they want to
capture with the family. There may be bits of information that are missing or are vague that need further clarification. They can plan for unique family circumstances, such as sharing specific information and gathering certain information from the family. This discussion is about how to engage the family in the COS process. It is not simply sharing a pre-determined COS rating, as the final rating decision is made as part of the team process in collaboration with families.

II. Explaining the COS

1. Team members explain to families why outcomes data are collected.
   • Families want to be certain the services their child and family are receiving are actually helping their child develop and learn. Collecting outcomes data is one way teams can help families understand this important question. Outcomes data are used to help the family, the program, and other stakeholders learn about the results of participation in early intervention or preschool special education.

2. Team members describe what child outcomes are measured.
   • There are three outcomes that are measured. They include 1-children’s positive social relationships, 2-acquisition of knowledge and skills, and 3-taking appropriate action to meet needs. Each outcome area includes a variety of functional skills and abilities that teams consider when measuring each of the outcomes. The three outcomes were identified by the field and adopted by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the U.S. Department of Education because these are important skills for children to be active and successful participants across all the settings in which they live, including homes, schools, and communities. All early intervention and preschool special education programs use these outcomes to measure children’s progress. While the outcomes and goals on a child’s IFSP or IEP are specific to the child these three early childhood outcomes stay the same for everyone. This allows all programs to measure the same progress for all children participating in these services.

3. Team members describe how outcomes data are collected.
   • The federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires early intervention programs and local school systems to report outcomes data for every child ages birth through five who receives early intervention or specialized education services. Early childhood outcomes data is collected when a child begins to receive services and again when the child exits from services. In Maryland, the data will be collected annually as well. For each of the three global outcomes, teams determine with families how their child, participating in early intervention or preschool special education, is doing relative to what children their age, without delays or disabilities, are doing. In collaboration with families, all team members consider the mix of functional skills and abilities a child has for each of the outcome areas and then determine how close or how far they are to age expected development. By looking at this initially and as children exit the program we can understand what kind of progress all children are making relative to each of these outcomes.

4. Team members check for family understanding before moving on.
   • Beyond sharing information about the three global outcomes and COS rating process, it’s important to ensure the family’s understanding. Asking open-ended questions may be more helpful that simply asking “does this make sense?” or “do you understand.” Instead try asking an open ended question, such as, “What questions do you have about measuring the three child outcomes?” or “how is this information similar or different to what you knew about measuring the three child outcome?” or “what else would you like to say or know about measuring the three child outcomes?”

III. Engaging Family Members in the COS Process

1. Team members invite the family to share information about their child’s functioning with regard to each of the three outcomes.
   • Inviting families to share information first reinforces the critical importance of their participation and the information they choose to share. However, to ensure the family’s understanding of each outcome it is
important that providers first mention the types of skills included in the outcome and then invite the family to describe how they have seen their child use those types of skills in meaningful situations. Sharing examples of the types of skills included in each outcome helps the family understand the type of information needed relative to each of the outcomes. As the family shares information other team members can ask clarifying questions to ensure all team members understand the detail of what the family is sharing about how their child functions in different settings.

2. The team discusses additional information from multiple sources (e.g., input from others, evaluations, assessments, child’s progress) in light of age-expected development and the three outcomes.
   - Following and in response to family input, providers share information from other sources. This may include their observations of the child’s functioning, skills or information from assessment tools or progress monitoring tools, and input from others familiar with the child (e.g., grandparents, child care providers, other caregivers, physicians, specialists) to provide a full picture of the different kinds of functioning observed. Information about the child’s functional skills includes reference to how close or far the abilities are to what is expected at the child’s chronological age.

3. The team discusses the child’s current skills (strengths and needs) relative to the three outcomes.
   - Each of the three outcomes is fully discussed, ensuring all team members understand the child’s full mix of abilities relative to each of the three outcomes. The focus is on the child’s current skills (strengths and needs) as compared to typical age expectations.

4. The full breadth of each outcome is considered.
   - Each of the three early childhood outcomes include a span of functional skills and abilities meaningful for a child’s participation in day-to-day routines and activities. The extensiveness of each outcome must be accurately addressed to ensure the full range of abilities associated with each of the outcomes. Teams should use available resources and tools to fully understand breadth of each outcome. Through discussion, team members should develop a shared picture of the child’s functioning.

5. The full depth of each outcome is considered.
   - The complexity and rich array of the child’s functional abilities must also be addressed. This means exploring how and when the child demonstrates different functional behaviors beyond simply identify the presence or absence of skills.

6. The team discusses the child’s functional use of skills versus isolated skills.
   - Emphasis is places on functional abilities in the context of meaningful routines and activities, rather than discrete behaviors or single test items.

7. The team discusses functional skills the child has and has not yet mastered.
   - Discussing the complete range of functional skills associated with each of the three early childhood outcomes, includes addressing behaviors that are and are not part of the child’s repertoire. Doing so helps the team fully understand the complete mix of a child’s functional abilities for each of the outcomes as well as understanding functional abilities he/she is not yet, almost, or intermittently demonstrating. Teams must also consider the use of assistive technology (AT) and describe the child’s functioning using whatever AT that may be currently in use. It is expected that a child’s functioning include his/her use of AT that is available in their everyday settings. Included in the conversation is reference to functional abilities that the child is currently demonstrating as well as skills that are just emerging or not yet part of his/her repertoire. Discussion about what is age-expected and the skills the child uses and does not yet use helps the team understand the child’s functioning.

8. The team discusses the child’s functioning across settings/opportunities.
   - Information about the child’s participation and demonstration of skills in different settings is discussed. The information shared paints a picture of the child’s abilities in day-to-day routines and activities. Examples include, home, child care, new environments, and community settings such as parks, churches, stores, and restaurants. It also includes how the child functions with different familiar and less familiar people such as parents, siblings,
 peers, extended family, child care providers, assessors, therapists, and around new people. The family is a vital source of information about the child’s functioning across a wide range of settings.

9. The team discusses **how the child’s skills relate to age-expected development (AE-IF-F).**
   - The team references or questions the child’s functional skills and how close or far they are to abilities of same aged peers without disabilities. Part of this discussion involves painting a picture of what is age-expected and talking about what is similar or different.

**IV. Including Family in COS Decision Making**

1. Using all the information shared (from parents and other team members), teams **synthesize the information separately for each outcome and in light of age-expected development.**
   - Information is discussed so all team members hear information about the mix of the child’s current functional abilities relative to each outcome and if the child’s functioning includes age-expected, immediate foundational, and/or foundational skills across settings. This information is clearly summarized for each outcome.

2. Team members facilitate the discussion about where the child is functioning relative to each outcome using the **decision tree process** and accurately **considering the child’s mix of skills.**
   - The decision tree process is used allowing for discussion at each decision point. The process allows for full consideration of the child’s functional abilities for each outcome. The team usually considers more than one rating and if necessary the team refers back to previous information/resources to help guide the rating decision. When using the decision tree, the team must consider the child’s full mix of skills relative to each outcome and in light of age expected development. Team members facilitate the discussion ensuring accurate application of the rating criteria and the distinctions between the ratings.

3. Teams discuss the **rating for each outcome in descriptive terms** rather than the number.
   - Descriptive terms rather than single numbers are used to describe the child’s rating relative to each of the three outcomes. For example, “to summarize our discussion on all of Ryan’s skills in the outcome ‘taking action to meet his needs,’ it seems that he shows occasional skills that are expected for his age, but does not do them across settings. He also has many skills that would be immediate foundational or just before what’s expected for his age. This means that he has some age level skills but more that come in just before. Through your participation in preschool specialized education we’ll work together to help him do more things similar to children his age.”

4. Team members **ensure team consensus** with accurate application of the rating criteria.
   - Following the discussion and decision tree rating process check in with the team members to ensure that consensus was reached. You might ask, “What do you all think – is this an accurate reflection given all that we’ve just discussed?” In reaching consensus the team must also ensure accurate application of the rating criteria.

5. The COS **rating appears accurate** given the information shared/discussed.
   - Given all the information shared and discussed the team determines a rating that is fitting. The team thoroughly addresses each outcome, considers the child’s current functional abilities across settings, correctly uses age-expectations with clear discussion and documentation of AE-IF-F skills (through strengths and needs), and accurately uses the COS scale, demonstrating understanding of the different meanings and parameters of each rating point.